Volk, Everett

From: Yashan, Dean [DYashan@mt.gov]
Sent: Monday, February 10, 2014 11:48 AM
To: Kusnierz, Lisa; Fortman, Kristy
Subject: FW: Riparian Health Assessment in TMDLs

FYI.

From: Guy Alsentzer [mailto:guy@uppermissouriwaterkeeper.org]
Sent: Monday, February 10, 2014 8:56 AM
To: Yashan, Dean
Subject: Re: Riparian Health Assessment in TMDLs

Dean -

Thank you for your help! These explanations are exactly what I was hoping for. You and your colleague Lisa did a great job illustrating how DEQ looks at buffer health. Much appreciated.
Cheers - GA

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On Feb 7, 2014, at 4:21 PM, Yashan, Dean wrote:

Guy,

The buffer quality ratings we apply for most of our TMDL development are somewhat qualitative based on both width and overall apparent health, often using aerial photos (via GIS) with some ground-truthing. Buffer health is not as simple as just a determination of buffer width. For example, a wide buffer that is in poor condition is not necessarily better than a thin buffer that is in great condition. From some of my experiences, during TMDL development we tend to look at some of the healthiest buffer examples for differing stream reaches and classify them as “good”, and then work from there with the “poor” often representing very little to no buffer.

Keep in mind that the concept/definition of “buffer” needs to be considered. I think a lot of literature values regarding pollutant reductions are likely based on a buffer that represents unaltered, healthy riparian vegetation. As part of TMDL development we need to consider the realities of differing levels of land management within buffers. These management activities can impact pollutant reduction potential and are generally reflected by our estimates of existing loads and the potential for further loading reductions via improved riparian buffers.

Attached is an e-mail response provided by Lisa Kusnierz. She is a TMDL planner working for EPA here in Helena, but also worked for DEQ as a TMDL planner and was the project manager for the Lower Gallatin TMDL you refer to below. Her response covers approach and language within her most recent TMDL document where buffer health and pollutant reductions were incorporated. This particular document (Kootenai – Fisher) is currently out for public comment.

Feel free to contact me if you have any further questions.

From: Guy Alsentzer [mailto:guy@uppermissouriwaterkeeper.org]
Sent: Tuesday, February 04, 2014 12:58 PM
To: Yashan, Dean
Subject: Riparian Health Assessment in TMDLs

Hi Dean,

Hoping you can help answer a question regarding riparian buffer values used in TMDL calculations. As you well know many TMDLs in MT possess a "Riparian Health Assessment" that typically grades vegetated riparian buffers on their ability to trap sediment; classifications are made as "good," "fair" and "poor" with respective reduction efficiencies.

My question is what is the width associated with each category? Not to be confused with the length of a buffer along a riparian zone. Put another way, what is the base width of a "good" "fair" and "poor" buffer in a typical riparian health assessment? I've attached a screenshot of a chart from Attachment C in the Lower Gallatin TMDL to help illustrate my query; the parameters in that chart only appear to describe the length, in miles, of surveyed buffers. Attachment C doesn't include further description of respective widths for classifications.

Thank you in advance for your help!
GA

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